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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7361  
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1030  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4578  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8119  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5680  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1484  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1438  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000245

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: REGIME CONTINUES PRE-REFERENDUM ARRESTS

REF: RANGOON 234

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: Authorities continue to arrest peaceful protesters and political activists. Over the weekend, six participants in a March 27 "vote no" demonstration were arrested, as well as five Muslim leaders in Rakhine State. An NLD vice township chairman was beaten in an intimidation attack identical to last week's assault on Burmese Human Rights Activist Myint Aye. The pro-democracy opposition remains disorganized in their response to the constitutional referendum and continue to wait for the NLD to take a public stand. Ordinary Burmese are largely confused regarding the referendum and believe that, whatever the outcome, it will only benefit the regime. A WFP source in Wa Territory informed us the Wa leadership has decided to support the draft constitution. End summary.

Arrests and Attacks Continue  
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12. (SBU) The NLD confirmed to us that on March 29, authorities arrested six youth activists, including three NLD members. The six participated in a "vote no" protest outside NLD headquarters on Armed Forces Day. The regime has yet to acknowledge their arrest or provide any information on their whereabouts or condition.

13. (SBU) Additionally, A Rakhine State Muslim contact informed us that five Muslim community leaders were arrested March 30 in Maungdaw, Rakhine State, while holding a meeting. Media reports claimed ten leaders had been arrested during a meeting at the house of Maungdaw District Myanmar Muslim leader U Than Tun, and attributed the arrest as politically motivated.

14. (SBU) Separately, a NLD Vice Township Chairman, U Myint Hlaing, was attacked from behind over the weekend and beaten with sticks. The attack was identical to the assault against Human Right Defenders and Promoters leader U Myint Aye that occurred last week (reftel). Activists cite this as further

evidence that the regime will use violence to intimidate voters prior to the referendum.

#### Opposition Disorganized, Ordinary People Confused

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¶15. (C) During meetings this week with several political activists from NLD Youth, 88 Generation, and ethnic nationality groups, many expressed increasing disappointment with the NLD leadership for their continuing failure to take a clear stand on the upcoming constitutional referendum. The NLD is undergoing bitter infighting, one NLD Youth member told us. Former military members are fighting with the civilians within the party, and the NLD Youth are fighting with their elders, who they feel shut them out of political deliberations and are too hesitant to support political activists. They express growing frustration about the lack of guidance from the NLD when the time remaining before the referendum is so short.

¶16. (C) During several meetings over the past week with INGOs, local NGOs, and community and political activists, all indicated that only a handful of people actually understand the specifics of the draft constitution and the implication of the referendum. Political activists are trying hard to spread the word, but their reach is limited and confined to quiet word-of-mouth effort. Internet campaigns reach only a small urban minority. Many advocated for more effective radio programming on the Burmese and ethnic language radio stations in order to reach the rural populations. They specifically requested programming analyzing the pros and cons of the draft constitution to assist ordinary Burmese in making an informed decision on referendum day.

¶17. (C) Many of our contacts believe most people will vote "no" because of their lack of confidence in and distaste of

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the regime. At the same time, many Burmese fear that the military will somehow know how they will vote and retaliate against those who vote no. Thus, no one will be surprised if the regime manipulates results to guarantee approval of its sham constitution.

#### Wa Ready to Approve the Constitution

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¶18. (C) Ethnic Cease-fire groups will be key to the outcome of the referendum. Spurned by the mostly-Burman pro-democracy movement, the support of the cease-fire groups has been key to the case the regime makes to its neighbors that it is the only institution capable of ensuring stability in Burma. Many of the cease-fire groups havenot yet taken a public position on the referendum. Although we receive reports that Kachins, Karens, and Mons will likely vote against.

¶19. (C) According to the head of the WFP's field office in Wa Territory, a liaison officer from Nay Pyi Taw visited the Wa Central Committee last week with messages from Secretary 1 Tin Aung Mying Oo and Intel Chief Ye Myint. The SPDC leaders urged the Wa to allow the immigration teams in the region issuing temporary registration cards to resume their work, which the Wa had halted, and asked them to vote to approve the constitution. They are the best armed of the cease-fire groups due to their narcotics trafficking, and have the most autonomy of the cease-fire groups. Distinction from the rest of Shan State has always been one of their objectives.

¶10. (C) After many rounds of meetings and discussions, the Wa leadership decided that the Wa should support the draft constitution because, for the first time, it will grant the Wa the status of a Self Administered Division. Wa Chairman Bao, who was reluctant to endorse the decision, has reportedly agreed.

Comment:

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¶11. (C) Though no one likes the regime, and bitterness and anger from September remain, pro-democracy forces remain divided. The voices advocating "vote no" have taken a scatter-shot approach, rather than uniting behind a common message. Many look to Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party to provide guidance, which it has yet to do. Most of the population remains clueless about what the referendum or constitution means. Absent effective leadership, and facing many obstacles in communicating widely, the committed activists recognize that the Than Shwe regime can easily ensure their sham constitution is approved. However, no one will be fooled that either the referendum or the constitution reflects the will of the people. End comment.

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